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Exploring Burden of Disease Metrics in EU legislation: A Systematic Analysis

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Background: The burden of disease (BoD) methodology is a valuable tool for evidence-based policymaking. However, there is currently no systematic analysis available regarding its use in the European Union (EU) legislation framework. This study aims to describe the implementation of BoD methodology in EU legislation.

Methods: A search was conducted on EUR-Lex, the official and most comprehensive platform to access EU legal documents. The main inclusion criteria in the analyses were date of publication (between 2004 and 2023, accounting for EU-25) and inclusion of BoD metrics (years of life lost - YLL, years lived with disability - YLD or disability-adjusted life years - DALY). Descriptive and network analysis were conducted to analyse the legislation content.

Results: Out of 2592 documents, 191 met the set criteria. Ten were legally binding, and 69% were published after 2018. The European Commission (n = 152) was the most regular issuing institution. BoD was mainly used as an argument (n = 93) and for impact assessment (n = 50). The metrics were commonly presented in the main text (n = 122) and in the annex (n = 48). EuroVoc domains like environment and social questions prevailed. The most frequent EuroVoc terms were climate change policy (n = 45), EU environmental policy (n = 32) and pollution control measures (n = 32).

Discussion: Despite the growing recognition of BoD metrics in supporting policymaking, only 191 documents published over the past 20 years within the EU legislation make reference to this methodology. Greater efforts in knowledge dissemination and directing research towards specific policy uptake may increase the application of BoD studies in EU policies. By advocating for increased awareness, promoting collaboration between researchers and policymakers, and targeting research efforts towards specific policy needs, a more comprehensive integration of BoD methodologies into EU legislation can be achieved, contributing for evidence-informed policies.

Key messages:

- There were only 191 documents of the EU legislative documents published in the past 20 years mention burden of disease metrics, mainly addressing environmental and social issues.
- There is a need to increase EU policy uptake from BoD studies, by conducting policy-oriented research, and building capacity among researchers and policymakers on BoD methodology.